

OPUNTIA

69.1E

ISSN 1183-2703

August 2010

OPUNTIA is published by Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T2P 2E7. It is available for \$3 cash for a one-time sample copy, trade for your zine, or letter of comment. Americans: please don't send cheques for small amounts to Canada as the bank fee to cash them is usually more than the amount. US\$ banknotes are acceptable in Canada at par value; what we gain on the exchange rate we lose on the higher postage rate to USA. Do not send mint USA stamps as they are not valid for postage outside USA and I don't collect them.

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SHERLOCKIANA: PART 6

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 3 appeared in issues #63.1B to #63.1D, Part 4 in #67.1D, and Part 5 in #68.1C.]

Sherlockiana Academia.

Many concordances have been published over the years for the Sherlock Holmes canon, of which SHERLOCK HOLMES FOR DUMMIES (2010, trade paperback) is the latest. It is co-authored by Steven Doyle, currently publisher of THE BAKER STREET JOURNAL, and David Crowder. The book serves as an introduction to Holmes and his world. It begins with a look at the characters, both the main cast and the hundreds of others who came and went in the stories. There is also a section on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, his literary influences, and his life. Victorian England is also summarized, since the setting is of equal importance to the characters, where it is always 1895. The stories actually extend to the 1920s, for as many readers forget, Doyle wrote them as contemporary stories, not period pieces as we think of them today. The stories also spawned a long list of imitations, some honestly meant as praise and others intended to cash in on a good thing.

The book analyses the themes and elements of a typical Holmes

story. It discusses the continuity errors in the stories, understandable because Doyle wrote them over a period of decades, and occasionally forgot who was who. Some supposed errors are much ado about nothing, such as Watson's old war wounds, which are mentioned as being in two different places on his body in different stories. The reasonable reader will agree that a simpler explanation is that Watson was wounded twice in the Afghan war.

The popular image of Holmes and Watson is not always congruent with the stories, mainly because of the movies. As an example, Watson is presumed older by a number of years than Holmes, but in the canon they were about the same age. Holmes was adapted for the stage as early as 1893, and for movies in the silent film era. The golden age of Holmes in movies was in the 1940s and for television in the 1980s.

The book also covers the Sherlockian fandom, and actual buildings and places mentioned in the canon. All told, it is a good summary of the world's most popular detective.

Holmes Anthology Pastiches.

THE EXECUTION OF SHERLOCK HOLMES is a collection of pastiches by Donald Thomas (2008, trade paperback). On the whole, Thomas writes well. The only quibble I have with this

collection, which fault I have seen with others, is that the stories would be better arranged in chronological order so they can build on one another. The first story has the same title as the anthology. Holmes has been captured by the criminal underworld and given a trial at a kangaroo court before sentence of hanging is pronounced. He uses psychology on his warders, and his trademark powers of observation to plan his escape. The bulk of the story is about how he manages to escape, with no special equipment, up a sheer wall and past other obstacles, while at the same time setting a booby trap in his cell to kill his would-be executioners. There follows the epilogue, which is an exercise in paranoia, as Holmes, his brother Mycroft, and Watson wonder if all the villains are dead and carry out an elaborate plot to bring final resolution to the matter.

"The Case Of The Greek Key" (EXECUTION) takes place during the pre-WWI years, as tensions build throughout Europe. There is a spy in the Admiralty, and Holmes is wanted to break the secret code used to transmit the stolen data to the German Navy. The German spy keeps changing not only the key to the code but the actual type of code. This allows for some data dumps on cryptography to be inserted into the story. The spy's identity is discovered, he is tailed, and slowly the connections to his handlers are made. One neat little trick is that the spy network is using the ancient Linear B writings as the basis for their latest code. Linear B is a proto-Greek writing that wasn't deciphered until the early

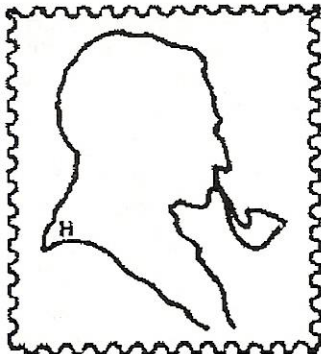
1950s; Linear A is undeciphered even today. Holmes and the Admiralty mandarins turn the spies and use them to transmit false information to Germany as the war finally breaks out.

“The Case Of The Peasehall Murder” (EXECUTION) opens with the brutal slaying of a servant girl who was six months pregnant by an unknown father. The defendant, widely suspected to be the father and who had sued others for stating it out loud, will hang if Holmes can’t find him innocent. The problem is the perjury of two country bumpkins who had a grudge against the defendant and claim they saw the murder happen. Holmes manages to break their story because they made the mistake of over-elaborating the details. The defendant goes free, and in the epilogue Holmes and Watson wrap up the loose threads of the perjurers. What is strange is that no further reference is made as to who the actual murderer might be. Neither Holmes nor the police address that issue. This isn’t just a loose thread but a downed energized power line whipsawing back and forth across the street spraying sparks everywhere.

“The Case Of The Phantom Chambermaid” (EXECUTION) is of a case that could only occur in Victorian times, when the night porter in a hotel claimed he saw a chambermaid go into a gentleman’s room at 01h00. She denies it, had no reason to do so, has proof she was at home, but is still sacked without references because the porter’s claim would take precedence. Holmes and

Watson travel from London to Brighton to London pursuing a charlatan psychic who appears to have some connection to the matter. There is an attempted murder with poison. The psychic’s sister is found to have impersonated the chambermaid in order to plant false evidence in the was-to-have-been-deceased’s room.

“The Queen Of The Night” (EXECUTION) involves a plot by the brother of the late Professor Moriarty. Col. Moriarty intends to steal some fabulous jewels from a noble family just prior to the coronation of King Edward. Much chasing about railroad yards and bridges; it would make a good action-adventure movie.



**Sherlock Holmes
Philatelic Society Sta.
at
StampExpo 400**

**September 26, 2009
Albany, NY 12220**

Pictorial postmark from a stamp show

THE IMPROBABLE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES (2009, trade paperback) is an anthology of pastiches, edited by John Joseph Adams. Some of these stories have appeared in other anthologies, while some are from obscure sources such as on-line Websites or small-press magazines. Certain stories I've already reviewed from their previous appearances, so I'll skip them.

"The Adventure Of The Field Theorems" (IMPROBABLE) by Vonda McIntyre has Holmes investigating the crop circles of Surrey at the behest of the landlord, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. It's all a hoax perpetuated by a tenant farmer but Doyle refuses to accept Holmes' proof because he wants to believe. Holmes spends as much of his time trying to make Doyle see the inconsistencies in his belief in fairies and spiritualism as he does solving the case. Not for the first time, the objective facts will not change someone's mind.

"The Shocking Affair Of The Dutch Steamship Friesland" (IMPROBABLE) by Mary Kowal is based on a throwaway line in the canon where Dr. Watson mentions the case in passing but never wrote it up. A young woman from a leftist Italian family is on a cruise to South Africa where she will marry her intended. Murder is done on the ship, and it turns out that Holmes and Watson were on the cruise as well. The investigation leads to the woman's brother and father, and her life is forever changed.

"The Adventures Of The Pirates Of Devil's Cape"

(IMPROBABLE) by Rob Rogers also draws on the case of the Dutch steamer Friesland, which in this version has been recovered by the Royal Navy off the coast of Scotland, adrift with cannon fire damage and murdered crews. Holmes deduces the attack was by Louisiana pirates, and the investigation thereupon shifts to that locale. His deductions make sense and smoothly segue the story to the other side of the Atlantic. So far so good, but the reader is then jarred by the totally unnecessary plot device of having the Louisiana police detective Holmes deals with turn out to be a cousin of Lestrade with the same surname. Holmes uncovers a plot and there is a fight to the death. The resolution of the story is apparently straightforward but the author tries to throw a supernatural twist in at the end which does not quite work.

"The Adventure Of The Mummy's Curse" (IMPROBABLE) by H. Paul Jeffers starts with an old Army comrade of Watson worrying about a curse after having been on an archaeological dig in Egypt. As the participants in that dig die one by one, Holmes investigates. The last death proves to be a murder for gain of an estate, made to look like it and all the other deaths, unrelated in actuality, were part of a mummy's curse. This story is plagued by data dumps on Egyptology.

"Murder To Music" (IMPROBABLE) by Anthony Burgess opens with Holmes and Watson at a concert where a Spanish pianist is

shot to death right in mid-composition. As he lay dying slumped over the keyboard, he tapped out a musical code with his fingers. The Spanish king and his mother are on a state visit to England, and it is feared that Catalonian separatists will strike, the pianist being the overture. An assassination attempt is foiled in the nick of time. I've never really believed that any dying person would leave a secret-code message naming the murderer. If one is dying and knows it, they would desperately race to leave a clear message that would name the culprit to the satisfaction of any court.

"The Vale Of The White Horse" (IMPROBABLE) by Sharyn McCrumb is set in Uffington where the famous White Horse is carved into a chalk hillside. A London doctor is found lying dead in the eye of the horse, carved with a seam ripper from a sewing kit. Holmes and Watson are summoned to investigate. The case ties in with a family of hermaphrodites and a cancer patient who died while under the care of the deceased doctor. McCrumb has stated she wanted to illustrate that country folk are not bumpkins as usually depicted in the canon, and in this she succeeds. I agree with her point of view; it has always annoyed me that Doyle depicted rural folk as ignorant or trembling in fear of some monster such as the Hound of the Baskervilles. I grew up in rural west-central Alberta, and if some horror was stalking the countryside, there would quickly be a Citizens' Committee stalking the horror with every shotgun and rifle in the county.

"The Adventure Of The Green Skull" (IMPROBABLE) by Mark Valentine shows the dark side of Victorian London. Factory owners are meeting their deaths in suspicious circumstances, and each body is found with a match between their fingers. Holmes and Watson locate the perpetrator, who is seeking revenge for what the factory owners did to their child labourers. After an exposition by the guilty party, they let her go free, on the grounds that justice can be served in more ways than one.

Miscellaneous Pastiches.

"The Case Of The Eccentric Testatrix" by Martin Edwards appeared in the February 2008 issue of THE STRAND MAGAZINE. Holmes and Watson are summoned to investigate a suspicious last will and testament. An elderly lady had her will changed just before her death. Her fortunes had dwindled over the years and there wasn't much but the house and miscellaneous. Holmes determines that the new will was done by an imposter, not for the main bulk of the estate but to get a painting she had hanging in the house. The painting's true identity was recognized only by the culprit and by Holmes as a valuable piece done by the French artist Horace Vernet. It has been established elsewhere in the Holmes canon that his grandmother was a Vernet, and the painter was her brother. Holmes would of course be an expert on his famous relative's artworks. Although this story reads well, the probability of Holmes being called upon to

a case where a family painting is the punch line is too much a forced coincidence.

Also from THE STRAND MAGAZINE (February 2009) is "The Affair Of The Forty-Sixth Birthday" by Amy Myers, about the visit of the King of Italy to England in 1891 and an attempted assassination of him by Sicilian terrorists (or freedom fighters, depending which side you're on). A decoy is killed in the King's place, but can everyone rest easy? As Holmes determines, the answer is no, because the Russian envoy, sneaky little git that he is, also knows how to decoy. He almost succeeds in carrying off the assassination for the benefit of the Tsar and getting it blamed on the Sicilians.

"The Case Of The Unopened Letter" (STRAND, June 2009) by Gillian Linscott has Holmes and Watson at home when a coffin is delivered containing a young woman still quite lively and trying to get Holmes' attention since he won't open her letters. She writes in violet ink, and Holmes, like many celebrities then and now, learnt the hard way that letters written in coloured inks are almost always from the lunatic fringe. The case at hand is a routine matter of an evil brother trying to steal the family inheritance from his sisters, kidnaping, and so forth. The story is marred by the author's poor characterization of Holmes, making him a far more malign individual than what the canon describes.

"The Case Of The Beggar's Feast" (STRAND, October 2009) by Lyndsay Faye concerns the case of a well-dressed man badly beaten in the streets and admitted to the hospital where Watson is working. Holmes stops by, proves the man and the clothes do not belong together, and he is a beggar. This starts an investigation which leads to the secret headquarters of the Amateur Mendicant Society and their annual banquet, a sumptuous repast with the best of food and champagne. Holmes and Watson meet with the head of the society, who explains the background of the group and how it was the beggar got mugged. At this point, the story cuts off with only a statement that Holmes will try to track down the culprit. I suspect the author was too lazy to figure out the rest of the plot. Reasonably well written but it seems more an excuse to write a vignette about Victorian-era mendicants and how they operated.

"The Adventure Of The Scarlet Thorn" by Paul Nash (2010 February, ELLERY QUEEN) involves the theft of diamonds from a tiara while the duchess was wearing it during a seance. In an apparently unrelated matter, a man had the door to his apartment stolen but there was no robbery of his rooms. There is multiple betrayal, as the thief has the diamonds stolen from him by a gang, who in turn discover that the diamonds are paste, the duchess long ago having sold them and now about to get insurance money for them. Holmes' chain of deductions skirts the edge of credibility, but the neat twists in the plot allow us to forgive the tenuous logic.



Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Sta.

1859

2009

The Hound of the
Baskervilles

31 Oct., 2009 Glens Falls, NY 12801

I'm sure there was a reason why the Glen Falls post office issued this commemorative postmark.

THE MAN FROM HELL by Barrie Roberts (2010, trade paperback) is a novel about the murder of Lord Backwater in 1886 on his country estate. His heir will not accept the police version that his father was done in by poachers, and comes to London to consult Holmes. The investigation begins at Backwater Hall, where Holmes and Watson soon determine that the deceased had more of a past than was imagined by his loved ones, but was also not the primary target of attack. After the funeral, at the reading of the will, some unusual clauses come to light, plus a long testament by Lord Backwater. At this point the story segues into a narrative

about how Backwater was falsely convicted and transported to Australia as a boy, then escaped, traveled the world, and made his fortune in mining before finally settling back in England.

When the story comes back to Holmes and Watson, Lady Patricia, the daughter of Backwater, has been kidnapped, and it appears her father's past is catching up to the next generation. A criminal organization called the Ring he belonged to wants something that he had. Lady Patricia is finally rescued but more murders are done and the Ring keeps attacking. Holmes comes to his conclusions and stages the traditional manor house scene where the detective points his finger at the culprit and shouts "J'accuse!". The accused happens to be holding a sword at the time, and Holmes duels with him while everyone else stands about watching them without bothering to at least throw a vase at the suspect just to help out. The guilty party is dispatched to no one's surprise and the case is solved. The novel reads well, even if it tells you more than you wanted to know about the details of transportation-for-life to Australia.

Holmes Out Of Place.

Holmes as the genuine article cannot be separated from Victorian London, though many have tried. Usually I avoid such pastiches in novels, but if I bought a magazine or anthology with such a story, I'll read it but generally without profit.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

IN THEATRES DECEMBER 2009

\$3
15157



LUCKY CLUES TABLE PRIZE

CANE	CANE	\$500 FIVEHUN
SHIRT	SHIRT	\$50.00 FIFTY
GLASSES	GLASSES	\$1000 ONETHOU
POCKET WATCH	WATCH	THANKS FOR TRYING
CLARINET	HORN	\$3.00 THREE
VIOLIN	VIOLIN	\$5000 FIFTYTHOU
CARRIAGE	CARRIAGE	\$3.00 THREE
SCARF	SCARF	\$20.00 TWENTY
KEY	KEY	\$25.00 TWENTYFIVE
POCKET WATCH	WATCH	THANKS FOR TRYING
FIREPLACE	FIREPLACE	\$10.00 TEN
SWORD	SWORD	\$1000 TENTHOU
STAIRS	STAIRS	\$10.00 TEN
SHOE	SHOE	\$15.00 FIFTEEN
BOOKCASE	BOOKCASE	\$2500 TWENTYFIVEHUN
POCKET WATCH	WATCH	THANKS FOR TRYING
TOP HAT	HAT	\$50.00 FIFTY
BRIDGE	BRIDGE	\$20.00 TWENTY
CLOCK	CLOCK	\$5000 FIFTYTHOU

SEE BACK FOR PLAY INSTRUCTIONS

009832-41

Canadian
scratch-and-
win lottery
ticket from
2009 which
ties in with
the movie of
that year.

"The Adventure Of The Dying Ship" by Edward Hoch (2009 February, ELLERY QUEEN MYSTERY MAGAZINE) is a pastiche written in Holmes's voice. He is bored with retirement in the Sussex Downs, and decides to take a pleasure cruise on a new ship, the RMS Titanic. Just after the iceberg, Holmes sees murder done and successfully identifies the culprit. Since both the victim and the murderer went down with the ship, the case never went further. Holmes finds himself in one of the lifeboats and survives, but keeps quiet from shame because it should have been women and children first.

"Room 31" by M.J. Trow (STRAND MAGAZINE, 2010 February) brings Holmes and Watson across the Atlantic to New York City by police invitation to investigate a Jack the Ripper type of murder. Trow wrote a number a pastiche novels with Inspector Lestrade as the main character. I reviewed a few of them in previous installments of this series on Sherlockiana, but gave up on them because his style of writing was wanting in the balance. In this short story he throws in Emily Dickinson, corrupt police, and a reporter who was the murderer for reasons explained none too satisfactorily. Holmes and Watson are part of London, but they do not fit into New York City.

The Women In Holmes' Life.

"A Scandal In Montréal" (IMPROBABLE) by Edward Hoch starts with Watson visiting Holmes in 1911 at his retirement in the Sussex Downs. A telegram is received from Irene Adler, The Woman, who had emigrated to Canada after her marriage. Her son Ralph Norton, now a student at McGill University, has gone missing and is a murder suspect. She summons Holmes and Watson to come out to the colonies and investigate. McGill's most famous professor, the humourist Stephen Leacock who taught economics in his day job, becomes involved in the case. Inevitably the scene shifts to Old Brewery Bay near Orillia, Ontario, in the lake district where Leacock had his summer cottage. (Orillia was the model for the town of Mariposa in Leacock's best known novel, SUNSHINE SKETCHES OF A LITTLE TOWN.) Ralph's pregnant girlfriend is with him, and the truth comes out the hard way about who did the murder. This story will be more amusing to us Canucks than outlanders.

"Commonplace" (IMPROBABLE) by Naomi Novik starts with Irene Adler learning of the death of Holmes at Reichenbach Falls and not believing it. Using a bit of logic, she tracks him down in Paris where he is incognito as a violinist at the Opera House. A shorter story than most, with a twist in the plot at the end.

"Mrs. Hudson's Case" (IMPROBABLE) by Laurie King begins with Mrs. Hudson having followed Holmes into retirement at Sussex Downs, still his housekeeper. This is part of King's pastiche series about Mary Russell, a protegee of Holmes. Hudson is complaining of petty thefts from her kitchen, so Russell sets up a camera and trip wire to photograph the intruder. Holmes is away working on a kidnap case. It turns out that the two events are related.

That's Fantastic, Holmes.

My collection of Sherlockiana avoids pastiches which take Holmes and Watson out of their time and place. This sort of pastiche is written by authors who do not understand that there are three elements to these stories: Holmes, Watson, and a world where it is always 1895 with fog swirling in the street and manor houses holding their awful secrets. Thus I avoid Holmes versus the Nazis, or him fighting UFOs. Supernatural fantasy is difficult to do with Holmes unless the author has the knack of invoking it in a seamless blend with the Victorian era.

THE IRREGULAR CASEBOOK OF SHERLOCK HOLMES by Ron Weighell (2000, trade paperback) is a collection of his short pastiches in which Holmes and Watson deal with cases invoking the supernatural.

The stories involve a manuscript written by Dr. John Dee, an Elizabethan court follower whose reputation today is that of a dabbler in the occult and alchemy, werewolves, an ancient Egyptian stele that confers immortality, a salamander cult in Venice, and a clash with a sinister occult group that has the Holy Grail and doesn't know it. The stories read well and evoke the Victorian era nicely. The supernatural makes sense in this context, and does not jar the reader out of story.

The same cannot be said for *GASLIGHT GRIMOIRE*, edited by J.R. Campbell and Charles Prepolec (2008, trade paperback), an anthology of eleven pastiches by various authors. Eliminating the impossible just got harder in these fantasy stories. "His Last Arrow" by Christopher Sequeira, doesn't quite work, depending as it does on a *deus ex machina* for the finale. It seems that all along Holmes was a djinn brought back from Afghanistan by Dr. Watson, committing murders and then covering them up by investigating them and providing other explanations and culprits. The story doesn't read well, and is made worse by its author confusing Middle East Arabs with central Asian tribes of Afghanistan; the two are quite different.

A more interesting fantasy is "The Finishing Stroke" by M.J. Elliott, about a painter who kills his victims by selling them deadly paintings. There is a suggestion as to how he does it when he mentions using lead-based paint to channel the emanations

from the paintings. He gets away in the end, and Holmes concludes that even if they had captured him, it would have been difficult to get sufficient evidence to convince a jury.

A number of the stories are crossovers. Peter Pan features in "The Lost Boy" by Barbara Hambly, the first story of this anthology. It doesn't come off, as there are too many dream sequences and implausibilities even for a fairy tale. "The Things That Shall Come Upon Them" by Barbara Roden is another crossover, involving the little-remembered Holmes imitation Flaxman Low. Both find themselves investigating the strange events at Lufford Abbey. Low concludes there is a supernatural cause and Holmes a logical explanation. The ending is ambiguous; things could be interpreted either way. Not ambiguous is the story "The Grantchester Grimoire" by Chico Kidd and Rick Kennett, using the fictional detective Thomas Carnacki, a detective specializing in cases of supernatural manifestation. Holmes gets a letter from a distraught woman whose husband was cataloging the chained library at Grantchester Abbey. He was found in an apparent coma and his wife believes that possibly one of the books was stolen. On arrival at the Abbey, Holmes and Watson meet up with Carnacki. Ghosts are running amok, and the three men stake out the library, with pentacles and garlic cloves at the ready.

Col. Sebastian Moran, Moriarty's underling, shows up in another pastiche "The Red Planet League" by Kim Newman, which apparently involved a crossover with "The War Of The Worlds". The story was written in thick clichéd Cockney and I gave up on it after a couple of pages.

"Red Sunset" by Bob Madison, brings a centenarian Holmes to California during World War Two to escape the Nazis. He and a Chanderlesque detective walk down mean streets to permanently lay to rest Count Dracula, also a refugee from the war. I would write an essay on how far modern vampire stories have strayed from their Gothic source, but that would require I actually read them. I leave it to Joseph Major to scourge Sexy Vampire stories.

All told, GASLIGHT GRIMOIRE was only about half successful. It was mostly the crossovers that failed, of which there were too many. Too many pastiche authors are not using the canon as their basis, but movies which departed from the true text.

"The Adventure Of The Death-Fetch" (IMPROBABLE) by Darrell Schweitzer has Holmes and Watson investigating an explorer recently returned to London who fears for his life. A doppelganger is haunting him, seeking revenge for betrayal on an expedition to the Orient. The explorer is killed, Holmes admits defeat, and the story ends abruptly. The story is a cheat. Schweitzer wrote himself into a corner and then abandoned the

plot with some hand-waving that it was all a supernatural mystery.

"The Singular Habits Of Wasps" (IMPROBABLE) by Geoffrey Landis has Holmes investigating a disappearing corpse near Godalming, and later he starts spending his evenings in the Whitechapel district of London. Watson fears that Holmes is Jack the Ripper but eventually learns that the Godalming corpse was parasitized by an alien being that rejuvenated it like a Heinleinian puppetmaster. The alien is now in London, planting its eggs in loose women, which then grow and burst the host open.

"You See But You Do Not Observe" (IMPROBABLE) by Robert Sawyer plucks Holmes and Watson out of their era into the year 2096, where Holmes is requested to solve the Fermi paradox. Holmes ingeniously works Schrodinger's cat into the paradox to resolve the question of why extraterrestrial aliens don't exist in our timeline.

If You Can't Be Squamous, Then At Least Be Eldritch.

"The Horror Of The Many Faces" (IMPROBABLE) by Tim Lebbon crosses Holmes with Lovecraft. A harbinger of an alien invasion is killing people and dissecting them for scientific research, much as a zoologist studies a new species of animal. The alien hypnotizes passersby into seeing it as someone they know; a sister sees her brother murdering the victim, -11-

Watson sees Holmes as the dissector, and Holmes goes up against his doppelganger. The story is written in the adjectival style of Lovecraft, not entirely successfully, and I skipped some of the verbiage.

“The Adventure Of The Antiquarian’s Niece” (IMPROBABLE) by Barbara Hambly concerns an American who has been courting a young woman at Depewatch Priory. Suddenly he is denied access to her by her grandfather and father for no apparent reason, and accordingly goes to Holmes for advice. The story crosses over into Lovecraft territory at this point, with hints about entities from the chasms of space and time being hereabouts the stately manor. Beneath the manor is an altar at the staircase of 6,000 steps. Yog-Sothoth is summoned, and Holmes helps stop the demonic spirit from possessing the body of the next lord of the manor. Not too many adjectives.

“A Study In Emerald” (IMPROBABLE) by Neil Gaiman is an alternative history where Cthulhu and his cohort have ruled the world for centuries, and apparently not that badly either. A German prince of the Old Ones lineage has been murdered on London soil, his green ichor splattered about. It is a concern to Queen Victoria herself, who summons the detective, points a tentacle at him, and commands him to find the culprit. A twist at the end, as the reader discovers Holmes and Watson have traded places with Moriarty and Moran in this timeline.

Professor Challenger.

Doyle’s other literary character was the blowhard scientist Professor Challenger. Holmes and Watson are sent to find him in a story by Martin Powell titled “Sherlock Holmes In The Lost World” (GRIMOIRE). They cross paths with Col. Sebastian Moran, the second most dangerous man in Europe. The story does a nice job of setting up the ecology of dinosaurs in the Lost World and how people would actually interact with them if they had to live there. Holmes and Challenger were of the same time period, and could well have met. Remember that Doyle set their stories in his contemporary era; gaslight and lost worlds are only considered period pieces by subsequent generations of readers but that is not how Doyle wrote them.

“The Adventure Of The Lost World” (IMPROBABLE) by Dominic Green tries to merge Doyle’s other series with Holmes. A specter is haunting London, this time a carnosaur that has escaped from Challenger. This could have made a good story tying together the Lost World and Holmes, but instead it is written in a slapstick parody style that plays havoc with the continuity of the canon. It tries to be humourous but only succeeds in bawdiness that wouldn’t raise a laugh in a music hall full of drunks.

Professor Moriarty.

“The Specter Of Tullyfane Abbey” (IMPROBABLE) by Peter Tremayne picks up on a famous throwaway line by Watson about the case of James Phillimore “*who, stepping back into his own house to get his umbrella, was never more seen in this world*”. The story adds in Professor James Moriarty, only mentioned once in the canon but in this story is engaged to Phillimore’s daughter. A ghost is haunting the manor house, and Holmes investigates. Phillimore does his famous disappearing act, Holmes proves the specter is mortal, but is unable to resolve the case fully and expose the machinations of Moriarty. The denouement comes years later, and puts a neat twist in the plot a la Edgar Allan Poe.

“The Adventure Of The Other Detective” (IMPROBABLE) by Bradley Sinor is an alternative history, if you can have an AH for fictitious worlds, where Watson loses his way in the London fog and returns to 221B Baker Street to find himself in an different timeline. Arriving at 221B, he finds the primary resident is not Holmes but Professor Moriarty, and the faithful amanuensis is Murray, Watson’s aide-de-camp who died in Afghanistan in the canon’s timeline. It turns out that Col. Sebastian Moran is on the loose, still the second most dangerous man in Europe, and working for that international criminal mastermind Sherlock Holmes. There is a plot to spring Jack the Ripper out of his prison, Jack being the Queen’s grandson the Duke of Clarence,

although it was hushed up at the time. (And the Duke was indeed a suspect in our timeline.) The escape is bungled. Watson meets another version of his wife Mary, who was dead by then in the canon’s timeline but alive there, and decides to stay. The two timelines cross paths again but there is no zero re-set; things have changed.

“Dynamics Of A Hanging” (IMPROBABLE) by Tony Pi brings in Rev. Charles Dodgson, better known to most as Lewis Carroll, the author of the Alice in Wonderland stories. Holmes is dead, having fallen over the Reichenbach Falls along with Professor Moriarty. The latter’s notebooks have been recovered but are written in a code that no one can solve, not even Sherlock’s smarter brother Mycroft. Dr. Watson calls in Dodgson, whose day job was teaching mathematics and logic at Oxford. Dodgson connects the code books with something that happened in his younger days, when Moriarty was a professor at Oxford with a young student named Arthur Doyle. The professor was suspected in the sudden and suspicious death of Doyle but Dodgson couldn’t prove anything, although he managed to drive Moriarty out of the university and into a life of more overt crime. Years later, when Watson and Dodgson consult over the secret codes, they finally manage to break it.

“The Human Mystery” (IMPROBABLE) by Tanith Lee deals with a curse on single women who stay in the Caston manor in the five days before Christmas. Holmes and Watson visit the stately pile, and indeed it seems that someone is working hard to make the curse come true. The culprit turns out to be a fan of the Sherlock Holmes stories that Dr. Watson has been publishing in THE STRAND. Stalkers are nothing new, and some fans, then and now, get carried away.

Perhaps not directly in fandom, but neither a pastiche, is the novel THE BAKER STREET LETTERS by Michael Robertson (2009, hardcover). Two brothers, Reggie and Nigel Heath, are London barristers whose offices are located on the second floor in the 200 block of Baker Street. As such, they get mail addressed to Mr. Holmes at 221B (the B means second floor, not a side-by-side unit as in North America). One of them, from a Los Angeles girl asking Holmes to find her missing father, sparks Nigel into flying off to the colonies to play at being a detective. The police take a dim view of this, bodies accumulate on both sides of the Atlantic, and a bizarre plot is unveiled about Los Angeles’ subway construction. Fair to middling mystery story, and would soon be forgotten and out of print if the author hadn’t tied it to the Baker Street duo. Wait for the paperback or borrow it from the library.

THE ART OF DETECTION (2007, mass-market paperback) by Laurie King is part of a series about San Francisco police detective Kate Martinelli, set in our current era. This particular novel involves the death of a Sherlockian named Philip Gilbert. His Russian Hill townhouse is a replica of 221B Baker Street, right down to the gaslights. (Which makes things difficult for the Crime Scene boys, who wasted considerable time searching for the light switches in a darkened room.) Gilbert’s body is found dumped in a Marin County park, but after all the jurisdictional disputes are sorted out (and the data dumps about the scenery), the San Francisco Police Department gets the case.

Gilbert was a member of the Strand Diners, a monthly dinner group devoted to Sherlockiana. He also was a dealer specializing in the stuff. The police have a lot of dreary work interviewing all those who knew him, the kind of boring footwork that television shows skip over.

The MacGuffin of this novel is a manuscript that may be an unpublished Holmes manuscript set in San Francisco worth \$300,000 or, more likely, a modern pastiche worth little. Since Gilbert died in the same manner as the victim in the story, this has Martinelli’s interest. She spends time backtracking the manuscript and its provenance, and discovers that Gilbert had been doing the same. At this point, much of the novel is taken up by the text of the manuscript, and we read through an entire separate pastiche

before getting back to the novel. The narrator of the story is a private detective named Sigerson, a favourite pseudonym of Holmes, as he investigates the death of an Army lieutenant who had been dallying with a transvestite in one of San Francisco's seamier districts. Supposedly this manuscript had been written by Doyle when he was visiting San Francisco in 1923, although the question is why Holmes would have been there without Watson.

Once the Martinelli story is resumed, she attends a Strand Diners meeting where the usual suspects are gently interrogated. No one cracks and bursts out screaming "Yes! I did it! And I'd gladly do it again!", so the investigation trundles on. One realistic aspect of this novel is that Martinelli and her fellow police officers are forever waiting for test results from Crime Scene or the Medical Examiner. None of this business from television shows about getting DNA tests back in four hours after discovery of the crime. The ending is a bit clichéd, with Martinelli being held at gunpoint by the perpetrator. The fate of the manuscript is also left in mid-air; is it real or a fake? All told though, the novel reads well, and the Sherlockiana is well integrated into the story.

"Skyler Hobbs And The Rabbit Man" by Evan Lewis (2010 February, ELLERY QUEEN) is set in modern-day Oregon, and is evidently intended to be the first in a series. The narrator is Jason Wilder, who responds to an ad for a room to let at 221B Baker Street in Portland. The landlord is a Holmes wanna-be who

believes he is a reincarnation of the great detective, notwithstanding the fact that Holmes was fictional. He quickly enmeshes Wilder in pursuit of Rabbit Man and his girlfriend, eco-freaks up to some sort of nefarious deed. It turns out there is a third group involved as well, and the whole affair ends with a pitched three-way fight in Rabbit Man's driveway.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[Editor's remarks in square brackets.]

FROM: Joseph Nicholas
15 Jansons Road
Tottenham, London N15 4JU, England

2010-07-29

You [did not] attempt an answer to my challenge that you explain why you think the human species will not follow all the others and eventually become extinct.

[Mainly because life is too short to fight every battle. A quick answer is that humans are aware of what is happening, unlike all the other species that went extinct because they couldn't control their environment and didn't know what was happening to them. We will overcome. We will colonize space, not in our lifetimes, and it will be done by means unknown now. -15-

Remember that after the Basques discovered North America in the 1490s and Columbus discovered the Carribean there was a lapse of two centuries before full-scale European colonization succeeded on a large scale. Western North America wasn't properly settled until the middle 1800s despite earlier explorers, and Calgary, typical of most western Canadian settlements, wasn't founded until 1875. The Spanish naysayers who said Columbus was a waste of time were never proven wrong in their lifetimes. When the French started to settle Québec in the 1600s, there were lots of people who said colonization would never work, and besides, what good were a few acres of snow. I expect that space colonization will proceed in fits and starts over the next few centuries, but it is not up to me to explain how it will be done, anymore than Konstantin Tsiolkovsky could predict the exact details of Apollo 11 and the International Space Station.]

My letter published in issue #69.1D includes two sentences beginning "Re: GET THE SKINNY ON SILVER". This text does not in fact appear in my letter and must, I assume, have been copied in from some other respondent's missive.

[You're right, and my apologies to both you and Franz Zrilich from whose letter the stray comment belonged. It was a cut-and-paste error while loading the text into the layout template I use for OPUNTIA. Sorry about that.]

FROM: Franz Zrilich

4004 Granger Road

Medina, Ohio 44256-8602

-16-

2010-07-26

Re: the U.S. constitution and the value of the dollar. Congress can currently regulate the value of coins as it wishes. States may not coin money, emit Bills of Credit, nor make anything but silver and gold a tender in payment of debts. The constitution does not use the word dollar. A federal amendment might state that one ounce of silver is worth one trillion dollars, thus solving some problems.

FROM: John Hertz

236 South Coronado Street, #409

Los Angeles, California 90057

2010-08-02

Developing ability at reading and writing is a lot of trouble, from which some run like rabbits, only to wonder why they're weak.

I Also Heard From: John Held Jr, Jason Rodgers, Sheryl Birkhead